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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

Written statement submitted by World Confederation of Labour, World Federation of Trade Unions, non-governmental organizations in consultative status (category I); International Association for the Defence of Religious Liberty, International Association of Democratic Lawyers, International Association of Penal Law, Latin American Federation of Associations of Relatives of Disappeared Detainees, Pax Christi International, Pax Romana, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, non-governmental organizations in consultative status (category II); Centre Europe - Tiers Monde, International Falcon Movement, International Movement against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism, Movement against Racism and for Friendship among Peoples, World Organization against Torture, non-governmental organizations on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[21 February 1994]

Situation of women in the Islamic Republic of Iran

1. For more than a decade, international public opinion has been concerned by the despicable condition of women in Iran, in particular the institutionalized discrimination based on sex. Great numbers of distressing reports, confirmed by international bodies and reflected in reports by Mr. Reynaldo Galindo Pohl, the Special Representative of the Commission on Human Rights, further justify this concern.

2. In recent months the world media carried steady reports on arbitrary, extensive arrests and degrading public flogging of women in Iran. Quoting Mrs. Shoja'i, the Interior Minister's adviser on women's affairs, the State-controlled newspaper Ettela'at reported on 26 May 1993: "While professional jobs for women have grown by 40 per cent, women's employment saw a 2 per cent annual reduction. This trend will end up in eliminating women from public life."

3. The Iranian Parliament overwhelmingly rejected creation of a parliamentary women's commission on 28 September 1993. Justifying this policy, a deputy asserted that such a commission "serves neither the interests of women nor the society" (AFP, 28 September 1993). The State-controlled Jahan-e Islam newspaper quoted the head of the ward for poisoned patients at a hospital in Mashad, the capital of Khorassan province, as saying, "During the past year, at least 3,600 people committed suicide across Khorassan province ... 2,530 of them were women". Doubtless, this alarming ratio is directly related to the tragic living conditions of women in Iran.

4. This was the situation in Iran when, on 25 June 1993, the Governments of 171 countries, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, signed a universal declaration at the end of the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, "emphasizing the responsibilities of all States, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations, to develop and encourage respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion".

5. Considering the mistreatment of women by the Islamic Republic of Iran, particularly after signing this universal declaration, and considering that their brutal crack-down is conducted on the basis of a discriminatory approach towards women, serious doubts shadow the earnestness of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the time of signing this universal declaration.

6. In fact, the dimensions of the mistreatment of women, based on institutionalized repression, demonstrate that the gender-based discrimination against Iranian women stems from the world view of a regime that is the nerve-centre of religious fundamentalism. In other words, one of the most significant characteristics of the Iranian regime, which is recognized as a systematic violator of human rights, is its official recognition of discrimination on the basis of sex in all areas, a policy and behaviour which is deeply in contrast with the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Article 1 of this Convention specifies:

"the term 'discrimination against women' shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."

7. Iranian women have always, especially in the past decade, demonstrated, through their resistance, their quest for freedom, equality and democracy.

Currently, however, under the rule of a theocratic regime, they are going through the darkest and most painful era of their social life. The Iranian regime seeks to justify its practices under the banner of "Islam".

8. But the different situation in many Muslim countries on the one hand, and the countless Muslim Iranian women who have been arrested, imprisoned, tortured and executed for their resistance against systematic repression on the other, show that this policy is in no way related to the culture and religion of the majority of the Iranian people. International public opinion cannot be convinced that Islam, the religion of more than 1 billion people, could recommend discrimination on the basis of sex. The status Iranian women have acquired in the resistance movement under the leadership of Mrs. Maryam Rajavi, the most prominent Muslim woman in the opposition, reflects the Iranian society's quest for equal rights of women and men at the highest level.

9. The alarming issue is that not only has the Iranian regime formalized in its laws such extensive discrimination in the field of political and civil rights, but it also publicizes it in the government-controlled press. A "university faculty member" was quoted by State-run dailies as saying: "Superiority of men over women has not been recognized just by civil law legislators. Psychologists realize it as well."

10. To express solidarity with Iranian women and hoping to end the unacceptable discrimination against them based on sex, the signatories of this statement urge the world community, in particular the Commission on Human Rights:

1. To adopt more effective measures to force the Iranian regime to end the brutal persecution of women in that country.

2. To issue a strongly worded resolution to condemn the policy of discrimination on the basis of sex, practised by the Iranian regime.

3. As recommended in the interim report of Mr. Reynaldo Galindo Pohl, the Special Representative, to urge the Iranian regime fully and immediately to revise its laws in order to recognize and enforce the full equality of the rights of women and men.

4. To urge the rapporteur who will be chosen to examine the situation of women in the world, to include in his/her agenda as a serious and top priority the examination of the situation of women in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

5. To call on the Islamic Republic of Iran to sign the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and to endeavour to apply its provisions, thus taking an effective step towards the acceptance of equal rights between women and men.
